

Another CIA Plot?

Operation Splinter Factor
 Stewart Steven.

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Noel Field was an amiable and naïve low-traveler who, while working with the OSS during World War II, made friends with a number of communists who later became leaders in Eastern Europe. In 1949 he was lured to Prague by the Czechoslovak authorities and arrested. His wife Herta, his brother Hermann, and his "foster daughter" Erica Glaser all went to look for him; Erica was arrested in East Germany, Hermann in Warsaw. They were each of them tortured, and Noel Field "confessed" that as an American agent he had recruited many Party leaders to serve Washington. This "confession" was one of the main pieces of evidence in the European show trials between 1949 and 1953 in which so many communist leaders were destroyed.

During the thaw that followed Stalin's death Field and the rest of his family were released. Noel and Herta chose to stay in Budapest, where he died, honored by the Party press, in 1970, and where Herta still lives. Hermann teaches at Tufts University in Boston, and Erica teaches in a school in Virginia. She has written an excellent account of her experiences in first East German and then Soviet prison camps.*

The man who arrested Hermann Field in Warsaw was Jozef Swiatlo, a Polish intelligence officer who also helped to stage many of the Polish trials, and who defected to the West in 1953. Stewart Steven has never talked to Swiatlo, who is now said to live in the United States; but the principal claim he makes in this book is that Swiatlo played a far greater part than has hitherto been suspected in all the main East European trials and that he did so as an American agent.

In 1948, says Steven, when Swiatlo was one of the most powerful men in Poland's secret police, he told the British Secret Intelligence Service in Warsaw that he wanted to defect. (Steven describes the scene of this encounter in very remarkable detail.) The British turned the suggestion over to Allen Dulles, who persuaded Swiatlo to stay on in Warsaw and work for him.

Dulles, according to Steven, had a theory, as nasty as it was foolish, that the peoples of Eastern Europe would rise up and "roll back" the iron curtain if only they were subjected to the worst sort of Stalinist tyranny. Although the West was then backing Tito, Dulles determined, according to Steven, to destroy all those so-called "liberal," "nationalist," and "home" communists who could conceivably become popular leaders and to promote instead those who would be hated by the East Europeans.

Dulles, in Steven's account, also detested Field who he believed had betrayed and embarrassed the OSS by helping to install communists in East European countries during the closing days of the war. When Swiatlo suggested in 1949 that he denounce Field as an American agent, Dulles happily agreed and ordered Swiatlo to "find spies everywhere. He would denounce top party leaders as American agents, and the evidence... would be provided by the Americans themselves. He would uncover a major Trotskyist conspiracy, financed by the United States.... He would report to Beria himself that the center of that conspiracy... was a man named Noel Haviland Field." This plot, Steven claims, was named by Dulles himself: Operation Splinter Factor.

If this ugly story were true, many thousands of people were killed or tortured or persecuted because of a plot by Dulles that had the unintended effect of making Stalin's control over Eastern Europe even tighter. But is it true? Almost all of Steven's crucial information and allegations are derived from anonymous CIA, SIS, and East European sources. Very little investigative reporting can be done without the help of protected insiders, but the blanket immunity Mr. Steven (perhaps inevitably) gives his sources, and the complete lack of corroborative evidence he provides for his claims make it hard to assess their worth.

While Mr. Steven will not identify his sources for the alleged plot, he did not bother to consult two of its victims—Hermann Field and Erica Wallach—even though he could easily have seen them when he visited Washington and Boston. Since both knew Field intimately and Hermann Field had seen more of the techniques and behavior of Jozef Swiatlo than any other man in the West, Steven's failure to interview them is astonishing. When,

after this book was published, Hermann Field wrote Steven asking why he had not tried to do so, Steven replied that he had not had time and that those who had been victims were least likely to know the background of the events in question. In fact, soon after his release Hermann Field wrote a detailed, unpublished account of his time in a Polish prison and his meetings with Swiatlo. While he believes that there are aspects of Swiatlo's defection that pose troubling questions, he remains unconvinced by Steven's general thesis. Erica Wallach suspects more strongly than he does that Swiatlo had some connection with the CIA. Their testimony is more pertinent than any which Mr. Steven has obtained.

Mr. Steven, moreover, makes jarring mistakes that undermine confidence in his book. He writes that after the war the East European peoples "were ready for socialism and a friendly firm alliance with the Soviet Union" but then describes Soviet soldiers in Warsaw as having "their spirit crushed by the hatred surrounding them." He claims that crucial to the conviction of Gottwald's foreign minister Vladimir Clementis for the then crime of "Slovak nationalism" was the prior unmasking of Otto Sling as a Slovak nationalist. He writes, "No one in Czechoslovakia would believe the line that Clementis was the leader of a Slovak anti-state center without Sling, being involved too." But Sling was not, as Steven claims, "Slovak regional Party secretary" but a Czech in charge of the Czech town of Brno; he never was and never could be associated with Slovak nationalism in any way. Operation Splinter Factor, announces Steven, "... had as its last fling direct responsibility for the Potsdam riots which were so dramatically to change modern Polish history." Potsdam happens to be in East Germany; the Polish riots took place in Poznan.

It is possible to interpret, as Steven does, the ruin of such men as the Hungarian minister of the interior, Laszlo Rajk, and of Vladimir Clementis, as consistent with a plot by Dulles to destroy the more "moderate" leaders of Eastern Europe. But then Steven declares, in a typical passage, that by 1951 "Splinter Factor had lost all interest in the now-imprisoned Vladimir Clementis. Allen Dulles was after the biggest catch of all"—Rudolf